

Free-Range Canines

Grand Opening of Off-Leash Dog Park

Freedom seekers, there's no way around it: in dreams begins responsibility. This time, the dream is the opening of San Diego's newest dog park, which also happens to be the only full-time, off-leash dog park in Encinitas. Almost a full acre, enclosed by a fence, it will be open seven days a week, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with extended hours planned for the summer.

At this dog park, as at most, supervision is in the hands of no one but the dogs' owners, even

LOCAL EVENTS

though it's on the grounds of the Rancho Coastal

Humane Society. Dog parks as a concept are over 30 years old, but it never hurts to repeat their central legal tenet. You bring a dog at your own risk and accept full responsibility and liability for your dog's actions.

How to train a dog — whether to use treats or praise-only — is a debate raging in dog-obedience circles. So, too, is the use of physical discipline prescribed by certain experts. The monks of New Skete, New York, for example, have published bestsellers about their methods, including the infamous alpha roll, by which an owner flips an unruly dog on its back and holds it there while staring into its eyes. (In revised editions, however, they renounce the alpha roll.) Lynda Morin, the humane society's volunteer coordinator, is asked: Is it acceptable to criticize the training techniques of someone you meet at a dog park? What's the etiquette?

"Dog parks are generally self-policing," says Morin, who anticipates 200 "dogs with their people" on opening day. "People get to know each other, because they're on a schedule and usually exercise their dogs in the same place at the same time every day. More likely than not, a member of the public will probably tell somebody who's doing more harm than good, 'You know, you really don't need to jerk your dog that hard.' Or, 'There's another way to do that.'" In the culture of the dog park, it just naturally happens like that.

At this park, a space will be reserved for puppies — under four months old. It's to be shared by small



Jim Silveira and Faustis, contestants in Dog-Owner Look-Alike Contest

adult dogs, which can often be "uncomfortable" around large, active dogs — "although," says Morin, "Jack Russell terriers love to play with big dogs. They *are* big dogs, they think. Chihuahuas, on the other hand, may be a bit nervous. So keeping them with dogs their own size is probably best. Owners will make the judgment."

Another judgment call is for parents: "Children need to understand there is a proper way to meet a dog, to approach a dog, and so on. It's up to the parent to determine each kid's level of maturity."

Not every dog belongs at the dog park, either. "Some weren't socialized

properly as puppies, so they may not know the limits of their behavior with other dogs. Or they may not understand dog warning signs, like growling, which means, 'Stop what you're doing.'" Morin is doubtful on socializing these dogs as adults. "They're dog-aggressive. They don't enjoy the company of other dogs."

Unwanted babies are to church doorsteps as unwanted dogs are to what? Morin, sadly, knows the answer. "People will abandon dogs in dog parks instead of taking them to a shelter. They think someone will come and find their dog, love their dog, and take their dog home. It's unfortunate, and we hope it

doesn't happen here, but we *are* a shelter, so you never know."

During the formal events on Saturday, owners will keep their dogs leashed. "For the first annual Dog Bone Hunt, the dogs and their owners will collect the hidden bones, and then we'll have a count." But won't the dogs eat them upon detection? "We're going to have them in little plastic Easter eggs."

Any suggestions on what sizes, shapes, or materials won't instantly be rejected by a dog who is entered into the Easter Bonnet Contest by its owner? "Some dogs you'll never get a hat on," Morin admits.

Among the contestants in the Dog-Owner Look-Alike Contest will be the Humane Society's president, Jim Silveira, and his seven-month-old German shepherd, Faustis. Do shepherds and other herding breeds like dog parks better than other dogs do? After all, there's finally a herd for them to gather. "They're usually more energetic than other dogs are, period. I think border collies are always a lot more excited to be around other dogs. But usually they just want to play, not actually herd them."

What is the latest popular breed in San Diego? "Big mixed breeds," says Morin.

You would probably get a different answer from somebody on the show-dog circuit.

Do the show-dog people tend to bring their dogs to dog parks? Does Fifi ever romp with Buster? "Probably not!" says Morin. "I would think the show-dog people have their own methods for socializing their dogs. Show dogs tend to be highly socialized, anyway. From

puppyhood, they're used to being around people and other animals. But they certainly *could* hang out with the average-Joe dog."

— Jeanne Schinto

Grand Opening of the Rancho Coastal Off-Leash Dog Park
Saturday, April 19,
9:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
Rancho Coastal Humane Society
389 Requeza Street, Encinitas
Cost: free; \$25 suggested donation for contests
Info: 760-753-6413 or
www.rchumanesociety.org

Local Events
page 85

Classical Music
page 99

Art Museums & Galleries
page 101

Theater
page 102

Pop Music
page 107

Restaurants
page 142

Movies
page 155